When the FBI Protests, Who Infiltrates the Crowd?

By Art Buchwald

I was shocked to turn on the television set last week and see FBI agents taking advantage of the first amendment to protest the indictments of three of their own for allegedly violating the First Amendment rights of others.

Demonstrating in the streets is not what the FBI does best. Under J. Edgar Hoover and his successors, the role of the FBI was to monitor those people who were organizing and financing protests, to infiltrate those groups that were marching and to report on the "troublemakers" who were using the sidewalks and boulevards to call attention to their grievances.

Old habits die hard for some of the agents, and last week's FBI demonstration was no exception.

As the FBI agents and former agents were fiercely protesting in front of the U.S. District Court Building, a man was taking photographs of them.

"O'Toole," shouted one of the protesters, "what the hell are you doing?"

"I'm taking pictures of the ringleaders of this demonstration for the agency. I got some really good ones."

"Are you out of your mind? We're all FBI agents demonstrating," O'Toole seems disappointed. "You mean you don't want photos for your files?"

"No, we don't want photos of us demonstrating. What we're doing is perfectly legal. It's covered by the Constitution."

"I gotcha. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll infiltrate the crowd with a tape recorder and check to see if anyone is talking about overthrowing the government."

"O'Toole, you don't have to do that. We're all good Americans and what we're doing is calling an injustice to the attention of the American people."

"Yeah, I've heard that one before. But someone's behind this demonstration and I think we better find out who. I hear the money's pouring in for a defense fund for the people who were indicted. It could be coming from the Soviet Union or Cuba."

"Dammit, O'Toole, the money for the defense fund is coming from former and present FBI agents. There is no foreign money involved. Why can't you understand we've got a legitimate grievance, and we want to see that the people who were indicted are not used as scapegoats just because the Justice Department wants blood?"

"I think we should tap the lines of the guys who were indicted. That could lead us to the source of the money, and also to where the orders are coming from."

"O'Toole, do you know who I am?"

"Sure, you're Turnbull from Identification."

"I'm one of the ringleaders."

"You could have fooled me. I never had you down for a radical nut."

"I'm not a radical nut. None of us is a radical nut. We're law-abiding citizens."

"Yeh. But in the '60s we were told that anyone who demonstrated in the streets was a radical nut. Either that or a misguided pawn in the commie struggle to destroy our way of life."

"That was in the '60s. Now everyone's in the streets. The farmers, the doctors, the hard hats. When you get desperate you have to let everyone know about it. What are you doing with that notebook?"

"I'm taking down names. We'll crosscheck them with the Socialist Workers Party. I can't believe all these people are FBI agents."

"O'Toole, this is a nonviolent demonstration."

"J. Edgar Hoover always said those are the worst kind."

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